

REDISCOVERY OF *PSILOCARYA NITENS* IN NEW ENGLAND¹

BRUCE A. SORRIE

One of the rarest, if not the rarest member of the New England flora is the bald-rush *Psilocarya nitens* (Vahl) Wood, whose precarious existence here is verified by a single collection from Massachusetts in the New England Botanical Club Herbarium. This collection consists of a single sheet containing but one plant. The label reads "muddy shore, West Pond, Plymouth, Sept. 13, 1925, L. B. Smith & F. E. Smith, Jr." There is no collection number.

This find was reported briefly in *Rhodora* 28: 88; and as recently as 1963 the NEBC Committee on Plant Distribution stated that this remains ". . . the only New England station yet discovered" (*Rhodora* 65: 33). *Psilocarya nitens* is only of local occurrence throughout most of its range from eastern Texas to Florida north to southern New Jersey, with outlying stations on Long Island, N. Y., in Plymouth, Mass., and an isolated colony in the dunes of northwestern Indiana. Nonetheless, the frequency with which suitable habitat occurs in the pine-oak barrens of southeastern Massachusetts and on Cape Cod suggests that this species should be found at more than one site.

During the summer of 1975, while conducting field work in the area, I found *Psilocarya nitens* growing on the borders of five ponds within the town of Plymouth. Unlike the previous few years when shorelines of these groundwater ponds were well up into the shrub fringe, a return to a more normal precipitation in 1974-75 produced moist exposed shelves varying in width from less than five feet to, in extreme cases, over fifty feet. The change in the plant life inhabiting these strands was profound. This year in Plymouth such species as *Sagittaria teres* S. Watson, *Rhynchospora macrostachya* Torr., and *Lycopus amplexans* Raf. were widely distributed and common; numerous stations were found for *Scleria reticularis* Michx., *Drosera filiformis* Raf., and *Utricularia cornuta* Michx.; and several ponds

¹Research Report No. 9 of the Manomet Bird Observatory, Manomet, Mass. 02345.

supported stands of these New England rarities: *Eleocharis tuberculosa* (Michx.) R. & S., *Psilocarya scirpoides* Torr., *Fuirena squarrosa* Michx. var. *pumila* Torr., *Utricularia resupinata* B. D. Greene, and *Eupatorium leucolepis* (DC.) T. & G. var. *novae-angliae* Fern.

On 26 August 1975 while botanizing at Kings Pond in western Plymouth, a low-growing sedge of the pond margin attracted my attention. Closer inspection revealed that two species were present. The first, occupying the wetter, muddy-peaty sites, and with rufous-brown spikelets proved to be *Psilocarya scirpoides*; the other, occupying somewhat drier, sandy-peaty sites, and with gray-brown spikelets was *P. nitens*. Thus 50 years had passed between the first and second reports of this rare sedge. Interestingly, the difference noted in microhabitat preference was found to hold true in subsequent localities where either or both species were present, although *P. scirpoides* was occasionally found in moist sand.

The following is a summary of known stations for *Psilocarya nitens* in New England; all are in Plymouth, Massachusetts.

1. Kings Pond, uncommon on northwest and northeast shores.
2. Big West Pond, uncommon on eastern shore.
3. Little Micajah Pond, two plants found on northwest shore.
4. West Spectacle Pond (west of Little Micajah Pond), frequent on eastern shore.
5. Grassy Pond (south of Bloody Pond), two plants found on the peninsula.

Collections of *Psilocarya nitens* have been deposited in the herbaria of Harvard University (GH), University of Massachusetts at Amherst (MASS), and the New England Botanical Club (NEBC).

POINT REYES BIRD OBSERVATORY
4990 STAR ROUTE
STINSON BEACH, CALIF. 94970